

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 NEAE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00
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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3033
INFO AMCONSUL BOMBAY
AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMCONSUL MADRAS
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 NEW DELHI 11462

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PARM, MNUC, IN
SUBJECT: PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE ON NUCLEAR EXPLOSIONS

SUMMARY: THE INDIAN PRESS HAS SEIZED ON A REMARK BY THE PRIME MINISTER IN THE JULY 26 PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE TO PROCLAIM THAT DESAI HAS DECLARED NUCLEAR BLASTS FOR CONSTRUCTIVE PURPOSES ARE PERMISSIBLE. WE HAVE STUDIED THE UNCORRECTED TRANSCRIPT OF THE DEBATE AND ARE QUITE SURE THE PRIME MINISTER DID NOT INTEND TO MODIFY HIS STAND ON NUCLEAR EXPLOSIONS. WE THINK HE WAS CAUGHT OFF GUARD ON THE QUESTION OF NUCLEAR BLAST TECHNOLOGY AND INITIALLY SEEMED TO SAY HE HAD NOT "DEBARRED" SUCH USE. HOWEVER, HE RECOVERED IN THE REST OF HIS REMARKS TO CONVEY QUITE CLEARLY THAT HE REGARDS NUCLEAR EXPLOSIONS TO BE BOTH HAZARDOUS AND UNNECESSARY FOR PEACEFUL PURPOSES. THE PRIME MINISTER ALSO WENT ON RECORD AS SAYING THAT HIS NUCLEAR POLICY COULD NOT BE BINDING ON FUTURE GOVTS. DESAI DENIED THAT HIS POSITION ON NUCLEAR

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EXPLOSIONS RESULTED FROM PRESSURE FROM THE US AND THE USSR AND BLAMED THE POKHARAN EXPLOSION FOR HAVING CAUSED INDIA "ALL THIS TROUBLE" WITOUT PROVIDING ANY BENEFITS. I AM SEEING SHANKAR THIS AFTERNOON TO SEEK FURTHER CLARIFICATION OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S POSITION. END SUMMARY.

1. REPORTING THE LOK SABHA DEBATE OF JULY 26 ON THE BANNING OF

NUCLEAR EXPLOSIONS, THE INDIAN PRESS HAS SEIZED ON AN INITIAL STATEMENT OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S RESPONSE TO HIS CRITICS TO PROCLAIM IN BANNER HEADLINES THAT DESAI HAS DECLARED THAT NUCLEAR BLASTS FOR CONSTRUCTIVE PURPOSES ARE PERMISSIBLE. HOWEVER, WE HAVE EXAMINED AN UNCORRECTED TRANSCRIPT OF THE DEBATE AND ARE QUITE SURE THAT THE PRIME MINISTER DID NOT INTEND TO MODIFY HIS STAND ON NUCLEAR EXPLOSIONS.

2. DESAI WAS RESPONDING TO A LENGTHY SPEECH OF JANATA MP SAMAR GUHA WHICH, INTER ALIA, ASKED WHY INDIA SHOULD GIVE UP THE OPTION OF SUCH CONSTRUCTIVE USES OF NUCLEAR BLASTING AS MINING, OIL AND GAS EXPLORATION, AND CHANGING RIVER FLOWS WHEN COUNTRIES LIKE THE USSR AND USA (SIC) WERE PURSUING THESE USES. IN HIS RESPONSE DESAI SAID THAT THERE WAS NO QUESTION OF NOT USING NUCLEAR ENERGY FOR PEACEFUL PURPOSES BUT THE QUESTION IS: "IS ANY EXPLOSION NECESSARY FOR IT?" HE CONTINUED: "IT IS NOT NECESSARY. I WILL SAY WHY. AFTER ALL, THERE MUST BE A DISTINCTION BETWEEN BLASTING FOR PURPOSES OF MINING OR WATER PURPOSES. THAT IS DIFFERENT. THAT IS NOT A NUCLEAR EXPLOSION. THAT IS A LIMITED PURPOSE OF BLASTING ONLY FOR THAT PURPOSE. I HAVE NOT DEBARRED THAT".

3. THIS REMARK WHICH IS THE BASIS OF THE PRESS INTERPRETATION, WAS GREETED BY APPLAUSE AND INTERRUPTIONS. THE PRIME MINISTER THEN WENT ON TO SAY: "BUT THAT IS NOT LIKE THIS EXPLOSION WHICH TOOK PLACE AT POKHARAN. THAT IS QUITE DIFFERENT. NO RESEARCH IS CONFIDENTIAL

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NECESSARY FOR PEACEFUL PURPOSES BY EXPLOSIONS". THE PRIME MINISTER SAID THAT POKHARAN HAD LEFT BEHIND PLUTONIUM AND HE WAS CONCERNED TO FIND OUT HOW MUCH DANGER IT POSED. HE SAID THAT "EVEN IN THE MATTER OF BLASTS", MANY COUNTRIES HAD GIVEN THEM UP BECAUSE OF ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS AND THEREFORE "I WOULD NOT SAY THAT I WILL USE THOSE ALSO FOR THOSE PURPOSES WITHOUT CONSIDERING THIS."

DESAI MENTIONED THAT EVEN NUCLEAR ENERGY FOR GENERATING ELECTRICITY WAS FRAUGHT WITH DANGER, SAID THAT MEDICAL AND AGRICULTURAL USES DO NOT REQUIRE EXPLOSIONS, AND REPEATED AGAIN THAT "OTHER USES... OF BLAST" HAVE BEEN GIVEN UP BY MANY COUNTRIES AND THAT ONLY RUSSIA WAS USING IT. BUT EVEN THE RUSSIANS, HE SAID "HAVE COME AROUND NOW IN THE TEST BAN TREATY THAT IT WILL BE STOPPED FOR ALL PURPOSES- EXPLOSIONS". DESAI SAID THAT HE HAD EVERY HOPE THAT THE TREATY WILL BE SIGNED "MAYBE FOR FIVE YEARS OF MAYBE FOR THREE YEARS". THEREFORE, HE ASKED WHAT THIS SHOWED AND ANSWERED, "IT IS NOT NECESSARY AT ALL TO HAVE THIS KIND OF EXPLOSIONS FOR USE OF NUCLEAR ENERGY FOR PEACEFUL PURPOSES. IF I AM NOT CONVINCED OF THAT, I WOULD NOT HAVE SAID THIS".

4. COMMENT: ADMITTEDLY, THE PRIME MINISTER'S STATEMENT WAS REplete WITH HIS USUAL MUDIED SYNTAX AND PROFUSION OF INDEFINITE

ARTICLES AND DEMONSTRATIVE PRONOUNS AND ADJECTIVES. NEVER-
THELESS, THE SUM TOTAL OF HIS REMARKS IS THAT HE DOES NOT THINK
THAT NUCLEAR BLASTING FOR CONSTRUCTIVE PURPOSES IS NECESSARY AND
HE MEANT TO SUPPORT THIS POINT BY CITING THAT EVEN THE SOVIETS
ARE WILLING TO GIVE UP SUCH USE. THROUGHOUT THE REST OF HIS REMARKS,
THE PRIME MINISTER KEPT REFERRING TO THE DANGERS OF NUCLEAR ENERGY
AND HIS CONVICTION THAT EXPLOSIONS ARE NOT NECESSARY FOR
PEACEFUL PURPOSES. HE CONCLUDED HIS SUSTAINED RESPONSE BY SAYING:
"THEY HAVE LEFT PLUTONIUM IN THAT HOLE (AT POKHARAN) IN A MUCH
LARGER QUANTITY THAT IT IS IN NANDA DEVI. AND GOD KNOWS THAT
CAN HAPPEN' THEREFORE, I HAVE TO BE OVER CAREFUL ABOUT IT.
EVEN NANDA DEVI IS PRESENTING US PROBLEMS FOR USING THAT NUCLEAR
DEVICE, AND YET MY FIRNEDS SAY THAT WE MUST HAVE THESE EX-
PLOSIONS. I HOPE THEY WILL THINK ABOUT IT IN A CALM MOMENT AND NOT
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MERELY GO IN AN ENTHUSIASM WHICH MIGHT LAND US INTO GREAT TROUBLE.
THAT IS ALL THAT I HVE GOT TO SAY".

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5. WE BELIEVE THAT THE PRIME MINISTER WAS CAUGHT OFF GUARD BY SAMAR GUHA'S GLOWING DESCRIPTION OF THE BENEFITS OF NUCLEAR BLAST TECHNOLOGY AND WANTED TO GO ON THE RECORD, IN HIS USUAL DEVOTION TO FACT, THAT HE HAD NOT ADDRESSED HIMSELF TO SUCH SPECIFIC USES BEFORE. WE THINK THAT AFTER THE APPLAUSE THIS STATEMENT GENERATED THE PRIME MINISTER REALIZED THE IMPLICATIONS OF HIS REMARK AND SHIFTED HIS EMPHASIS TO THE DANGERS OF NUCLEAR USAGES, EXPLOSIONS IN PARTICULAR. C.M. STEPHEN (CONG-I), THE LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION FOR ONE, UNDERSTOOD CLEARLY THAT THE PM'S POSITION HAD NOT CHANGED. STEPHEN'S ONLY QUESTION, ASKED TWICE, WAS WHETHER THE PRIME MINISTER WOULD REVISE HIS POLICY IF IT WERE SCIENTIFICALLY ESTABLISHED THAT EXPLOSIONS ARE NECESSARY FOR THE PURPOSE OF NUCLEAR RESEARCH.

6. NOT BINDING ON FUTURE GOVERNMENTS
THE PRIME MINISTER'S ANSWER TO THIS QUESTION INCLUDED HIS FIRST FLAT STATEMENT THAT HIS POLICY WOULD NOT BE BINDING ON FUTURE
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GOVERNMENTS. HE BEGAN BY SAYING THAT HE COULD NOT SAY WHAT HE WOULD DO IN THE FUTURE. HE SAID HE WAS PREPARED TO TALK WITH THE SCIENTISTS AND IF THEY CAN CONVINCE HIM, HE WOULD CONSIDER WHAT WAS TO BE DONE. BUT ULTIMATELY THE DECISION MUST BE HIS, BECAUSE SCIENTISTS CAN ALSO BE AS OBSTINATE AS HE IS. PUSHED BY STEPHEN AGAIN TO SAY WHETHER HIS "ANNOUNCEMENT MADE IN THE INTERNATIONAL PLANE" IS FINAL OR OPEN TO REVISION, DESAI SAID, "WHEN I SAY IT IS FINAL, THEY CAN ALSO SAY 'WHAT WILL HAPPEN AFTER YOU? WHAT WILL THE NEXT GOVT DO'" I CANNOT SAY; I CANNOT BIND THEM. NO GOVERNMENTS ARE EVER BOUND. HOW CAN I SAY THAT? I CANNOT BIND ANY FUTURE GOVERNMENT. EVEN IF I TRIED TO DO SO, IT WILL BE FUTILE. NOBODY CAN DO THAT. THEREFORE, THAT IS NOT THE QUESTION". THE DEBATE THEN ENDED WITH MORARJI REITERATING THAT HE IS "CONVINCED COMPLETELY AT PRESENT" THAT IT IS NOT NECESSARY TO HAVE NUCLEAR EXPLOSIONS FOR PEACEFUL PURPOSES. HE SAID THAT INDIA WAS SELF RELIANT AND THAT IT WAS GOOD THAT THEY (THE NUCLEAR SUPPLIERS), BY NOT HELPING INDIA, WERE MAKING INDIA MORE SELF RELIANT. INDIA'S SCIENTISTS, HE SAID, HAVE ENOUGH CAPACITY TO MAKE THEIR OWN WAY, BUT IT WILL TAKE TIME.

7. SUPER POWER PRESSURES AND POKHARAN

SAMAR GUHA AND A FEW OTHER MPS IN THEIR REMARKS ALSO ASKED IF INDIA'S NUCLEAR POLICY WAS THE RESULT OF PRESSURE FROM THE USA AND THE USSR BECAUSE OF DEPENDENCE UPON THESE COUNTRIES AS SUPPLIERS AND BECAUSE THESE COUNTRIES WANTED TO MONOPOLIZE ALL NUCLEAR TECHNOLOGY. THE PRIME MINISTER RESPONDED THAT HE WAS AGAINST NUCLEAR EXPLOSION FROM CONVICTION NOT FROM ANY PRESSURE FROM THE USA AND THE USSR. HE SAID "THEIR PRESSURE IS FOR US TO SIGN THIS TREATY FOR SAFEGUARDS WHICH WE ARE REFUSING". HE THEN REPEATED HIS VIEWS THAT THE TREATY IS DISCRIMINATORY, THAT

THERE MUST BE EQUALITY, AND THAT INDIA IS PREPARED TO SUFFER
INCONVENIENCES BY NOT SIGNING. "BUT WE WILL NOT SUBMIT TO THAT
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KIND OF THING, BECAUSE THAT IS A MATTER OF NATIONAL HONOR. IT
IS NOT A QUESTION MERELY OF THIS OR THAT". LATER DESAI SAID
THAT IT IS "POKHARAN WHICH CREATED ALL THIS TROUBLE AND WITHOUT
OUR GAINING ANYTHING". HE SAID THAT WAS WHY "THEY ARE ASKING NEW
FOR SAFEGUARDS. THEY BELIEVE IT IS ONLY FOR WEAPONS AND NOTHING
ELSE". THAT, HE SAID, IS WHY THEY SAY YOU MUST SIGN THIS TREATY.
HE REPEATED THAT HE HAS SAID OFTEN THAT MRS. GANDHI DID NOT WANT
THE EXPLOSION FOR WEAPONS PURPOSES BUT FOR POLITICAL PURPOSES
AND THAT IT DID NOT ADVANCE ANY KNOWLEDGE. HE SAID HE WAS GETTING
"ALL THAT MATERIAL" OUT OF CUPBOARDS AND WADING THROUGH IT TO
FIND OUT WHAT GOOD THE EXPLOSION DID INDIA, AND HE ADDED, "NOBODY
KNOWS YET, AFTER ALL THESE YEARS". ALSO ASKED IF THE NUCLEAR
POLICY WAS A QUESTION OF "MORAL POSTURE ONLY" DESAI DENIED THIS
AND REPEATED AGAIN THAT THE POLICY WAS NOT A NEW ONE;
IT HAD BEEN THERE EVER SINCE HIROSHIMA WHEN NEHRU DECLARED IT FROM
THE HOUSETOPS.

8. TARAPUR AND SOVIET HEAVY WATER

AS TO THE QUESTION OF WHY INDIA IS NOT REPROCESSING, DESAI
SAID THAT INDIA IS BOUND BY THE AGREEMENT AND THAT IT CANNOT
REPROCESS UNLESS THE US AGREES. "I CANNOT BREAK THAT: IT IS
NOT MY CREATION", HE SAID, "IT IS WHAT I HAVE INHERITED". HE
ALSO DISCLAIMED RESPONSIBILITY FOR DELAYS IN HEAVY WATER
PRODUCTION AND FOR THE SAFEGUARDS ON SOVIET HEAVY WATER. THE
DELAYS RESULTED FROM THE ACTIONS OF THE PREVIOUS GOVT AND THAT GOVT
HAD ALSO AGREED TO THE SAFEGUARDS.

9. I SHALL SEE V. SHANKAR THIS AFTERNOON AND TRY TO
FIND OUT WHETHER THERE HAS INDEED BEEN ANY EROSION IN THE PM'S
OPPOSITION TO PNES.
GOHEEN

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Message Attributes

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